

APOSTOLIC CALLING AND WORK:

A SERMON

26

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ORDINATION OF STUDENTS

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Apostolic Calling and Apostolic Work.

And these signs shall follow them that believe : in my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.—ST. MARK XVI. 17, 18.

It may well call forth a strange feeling in us, brethren, who stand to-day within the courts of a Christian temple, with the litanies and chants of a stately worship, to go back to that time, that place, when our Lord breathed His Spirit on His chosen ; and think how changed, seemingly, the call, the office ; a few unlettered fishermen then in a world of wise and great, preaching and breaking bread to a few worshippers in upper rooms or catacombs ; a clergy now, among the learned and honored of Christendom. Yet, changed as are the circumstances, it is the same ; the same economy of God in an altered world, the same kingdom of Christ in its unbroken harmony of word and sacrament. And we, I trust, as disciples of a present Lord, come hither, believing that this act of consecration is no quaint and faded relic of the past, but a holy reality.

I speak to-day of the character of the Christian ministry. It is a subject too large to touch more than its outmost edge, too solemn that I should spend the hour in any merely critical argument concerning it. I would awaken in you the highest sense of your divine calling; but I would have you feel its whole power. It is well for us to study the evidences of a primitive Episcopacy and three-fold order. We are witnesses, indeed, to the fact of Scripture and history. We keep faithfully the gift of the past: but we are workmen in the present. It is my deep conviction, that in an age which has lost its faith in any spiritual kingdom, in any God-made order; no mere theory of office can meet the deeper issues of the time: but we are to show, as St. Paul did by the "signs of an apostle wrought among them," that the ministry of the Church is no traditionary name, but has the character and function of an organ of the living body. With this aim before me, I find its meaning in these words of Christ. Our Lord declared to His apostles the signs that should follow their true labor. We are not to interpret them, with the modern Irvingite, that miracles are the necessary proofs of the apostolate. We recognize in the tongues and the healing only the accompaniments of a first, unformed life; but in the organized body of Christ we see the law of His working. It is at the intrinsic character of these signs we must look. They were the real, practical fruits of the Lord working with them. And this is the idea I draw from the passage, that apostolic character and apostolic work

are the confirming note of an apostolic ministry. I would have you grasp this view of your high calling; and I would offer this as my heartfelt word to my young brethren, who now receive the gift, not of an earthly Bishop, but through him of "the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls."

It is, then, from this promise of Christ at His departure, that I draw the conception of the ministerial office, which I wish to set before you in its distinct light. He committed to the hands of men the work which he had begun; and though no longer in the flesh, He declared that He was still to abide the Personal Head of believers. We accept, then, this divine fact of the ministry, that it is not of men, nor by man, but the gift of Jesus Christ. We find in the calling of the apostolate, as an order set apart to minister His word and sacraments, its fountain and seed. It is impossible for us to hold, with any earlier or modern theorists, that such a clerus or class was the outgrowth of a later or false spirit of severance. We recognize as fully as any, as I am yet to show, that the whole body of Christ was enlivened by His spirit; each part, in the noble image of Paul, from head to foot beating with one life-blood; each with its peculiar tie, its proper work; each in a high sense a "priest unto God:" but we see also this fact from the first, of a ministry not severed from it, not lessening its general action, any more than the action of brain or heart lessens the power of the whole, but in communion with it. We see, again, in the history of

the Church, the outgrowth of that root. As the body of Christ is a perpetual, organized, historic fact, so is the ministry the living witness of its continuity. It is true, that as the extraordinary signs of the first age were needed no more, as the kingdom of Christ became a Catholic one, in contact with a world of science, letters, social growths, the passing features of the ministry changed also; no longer a few apostles, but new orders from one germ—Bishop, presbyter and deacon; no longer wandering, but settled; no longer God-taught, but skilled in all the wisdom of the time. But while the first features changed, the law remained. It is of no essential moment, whether the apostle is identical with the bishop, or the new office arose out of the presbyter-bishops of the churches; for the change came in the natural transition of the Church to its diocesan form, within the life-time of St. Paul, and with apostolic sanction.—It was a normal growth. This is the Catholic principle, unperturbed and simple. We need not dwarf this historic truth by the questionable views of those who make it a mere chronological succession, a chain in which one broken link destroys the whole. There is no more need of this, than to confound the central feature of an English Constitution with the legitimacy of a later Stuart. The Church bears witness to the broad fact, that “from the Apostles’ time these orders have been,” and therefore “continues, reverently uses and esteems them.” It is the affirmation of her divine lineage, of the divine law of her organic life.

But we pass hence to the deeper truth, without which this outward ministry is an empty name. Jesus Christ is the personal head, by whose spirit the body is enlightened and sanctified. It will be seen at once how this gives its clear meaning to the office. The ministry of Christ is not an order of men who, now that He has departed, have received a power which they are to wield in their own inherent right, as His viceroys: but they are witnesses and servants of a present Lord. They are not mediators between men and Christ; they have no deposited power of pardon, of absolute teaching or authority: they pronounce His pardon to the penitent, as His ambassadors. The Christian minister is not the successor of the Hebrew priest. That priestly work was fulfilled in the one High Priest; and it is strange indeed, that any who grasp the argument of the great Epistle to the Hebrews, can so lose the analogy, which lies not in the continuance, but the fulfilment of that order and the new creation of another; strange, that wise divines, in their zeal to base the Christian ministry on the Jewish, have often unwittingly indulged that sacerdotal theory, which narrows, not exalts our calling. We do not offer dead sacrifices, we teach and minister in His name, who is the living sacrifice. This gives its only meaning to word and sacrament. Christ speaks by our mouths, yet by His own spirit to the mind of believers; Christ conveys by our ministry His own grace to the heart of believers. The written word is a dead letter, unless His mind illumine each mind: the sacra-

ments are not depositories of grace, but means by which the faithful and penitent are to commune personally with Him. We, His ministers, are thus one in Him with all the people of God; not a barrier interposing between them and their head; not the Church, but servants of Him in the Church, His Church; a vital organ, a mighty function of the body, but only a part of that which He pervades from the heart and brain to the farthest joint; that articulate, harmonious whole, whose healthy life is only when all work together. And such will be the influence of this Christian spirit, to make the minister of God always mindful of his true calling; one with his Master, one with all his brethren; his life no arrogant assumption of office, no slothful resting on the fact of office, but a life divine, self-sacrificing; a consecration to duty, not a prerogative of personal power or ease; a calling made sure in the apostolic likeness of his own character, in apostolic labor and the signs following; Christ working with him to teach, and heal, and bless.

This, then, was the conception of their office that gave power to the first ministers of Christ. It was in this consciousness that they were witnesses of the unseen Christ, that they spake the burning words of truth, and broke the daily bread of His Communion, and men recognized their calling. They needed no ingenious arguments of primitive Episcopacy, but their apostleship was proved by *being* apostles; and when, as in that day, a Paul could say in his touching words, "I think God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed

unto death," when it meant supremacy in toil, in hunger and imprisonment, not rank or ease, there were few who sought for envy a rank whose pastoral staff was the badge of real wandering, and whose mitre of martyrdom. And such as it was at the first, is the power of the Christian ministry always, when it is true to this character. It is a divine, transmitted office, yet no mere formal succession, but as it passes downward, this living line of apostolic men, who have their witness in their apostolic work. We do not ask for the miraculous gifts, the cure of diseases and exorcising of demons. Our power still lies in the dispensation of word and sacrament: we have still the essential gift of tongues and prophecy through the pulpit: we have the spiritual miracles of love and charity to men. The living ministry of Christ is bound forever with the life of the Church. And we may know what is always the cause of its decay. It is not because there is any falsehood in the claim of such a ministerial order; but when this conscious faith, that the ministry is the witness of the present, the invisible Lord, is faded away; when the Church rests only on the traditions of the past; when it substitutes a formal theology for the heartfelt truth of Christ; when it loses the personal, spiritual life of piety; then the office of the priest becomes only a formal commission. There is no longer the ministry, but there arises the theory of a sacerdotal caste, endowed with inherent powers in the plan of Christ Himself. The change may be slow and subtle, but it is fatal; it turns the very truth of a divinely-ordered organ

of the body into a class that severs itself from the body and the body from Christ; an order of ecclesiastics, not apostolic men; of exclusive privilege, not duty; of personal arrogance, not fellowship. We turn to the page of Church history, and we see this error creeping by degrees over the mind of men. Even with the day of Tertullian, the bishop has become the *summus sacerdos*, no longer the servant of the High Priest, in whom the sacrifice is closed; the presbyter and deacon are another priest and levite; the worship of the Church, a temple rite, in which the clergyman is screened from the profane gaze of the people; and so step by step his true relation is lost, his function changed. That germinal falsehood is completed in the Romish hierarchy; the clergy become the Church; they do not pronounce, but give pardon; they minister no longer a holy communion, but their consecrating touch changes the elements by a special miracle; each is a priestly mediator up to the highest, who calls himself the vicar of God, the infallible Pontiff of Christendom. Thus at length out of one error there came that gathered growth of pride and hypocrisy and spiritual despotism, which smothered the life of the Church of God. It was with the loss of its true meaning, that faith in any divine ministry died out of the minds of men. The truth of an apostolic order was confounded with a priestly caste. The clergyman was only the member of a learned profession, the titled retainer of a state religion, or the hireling of the people. And thus we find again another fact, equally weighty, as in the last days of the Hebrew religion, when the

priest had lost the spiritual vision, and the prophet came out of the wilderness, and men forsook the dead temple for the living oracle. We see it in the barren time of the English Church, when the burning tongue of Wesley spoke to the poor, and the crowd listened as to the voice of a new Pentecost; we see always a wild life arise, where a healthier or more lasting life does not exist in the body of Christ.

Here, then, we learn our position, who are fallen on the "evil days and evil tongues" of controversy and doubt. We believe in the reality of the Church of Christ, of an apostolic ministry; and we recognize it as one of the great wants of the time to restore such a faith. And what is it, then, that shall convince an unbelieving world of such a truth? It is, I reply, and the whole bearing of my argument is gathered up in this thought, it is when, like those first commissioned servants of Christ, we show our calling by the works we do, through the confirming spirit of Christ. "Truly," says St. Paul, "the signs of an apostle were wrought amongst you, in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." This was the note of a divine calling then, and it is so now. The office and the work must go together. We may distinguish, but never divide them. It is the most fatal mistake to think that a theory of the ministry, however true to Scripture and history, will win men to the truth. Let there be merely the exhibition of our valid pedigree—let us be able to count every name, from the first Bishop of Ephesus to the latest of to-day, and if there be no real likeness to the

apostolic character, what is it but the proof of our degeneracy? It is the apostolic order men want, but it is also the living apostle; and if we forget this fact, that claim of office will become with us, as it has been in the past, a theory of arrogance; alas! as we have seen it, but too plainly, with many in the Church of England and our own, who, to restore the age from its irreverence, have sought to reproduce the costume of the past, the faded copy of a monastic, not men like St. Paul or St. John. We should learn a deeper lesson. The primitive orders arose, as I have shown, out of the needs of the Church; the deacon, as he was required for the growing community of the poor; the diocesan bishop, as an office succeeding that of the apostle in the changed condition of things; another, yet the same in its principle. And thus must the ministry in every age meet the wants and present emergencies of the body; must be teachers and leaders in the kingdom where the living Spirit of God dwells and pours His fresh life. If we possess a divine ministry, it must show itself the most active, most earnest, most fruitful of all. In the truest sense we may say of it, as the Greek sage said of the Divine nature, "God is the mover, the immortal energy; His Being is in his act, else it is only a possible being, an abstraction." We have an Episcopate. If it be, as with the apostles, the central, active, pervading heart of the Church, not only a spiritual lordship, an official charge of a vast Diocese, where its personality is never felt, the Diocese will be a family, and a paternal authority will win reverence and love. We have a Presbyterate. Is it an order that

meets the varied wants of every class and condition, so that the body of Christ shall be felt to be the broadest communion of all the baptized, rich and poor, lettered and simple? If it be less than this, if it be chiefly the clergy of a rich and fashionable denomination of Christians, it is not true to its lineage. We have a Diaconate: does it do deacon's work? If it be, as it was meant to be, the aiding hand of the Church in her work for the poor and the widow; the almoner of apostles, it comes from St. Stephen; but if not, its ordination will make it only a theory. Where are our evangelists, who are to sow broadcast in the wide field of missionary labor, this prairie land that asks a Christian tilth? Where are our prophets and teachers, who show the manifold power of God to every class and condition of men? These are the questions that the Church needs to answer. It is answering them. It is the noble aim of the wisest and the holiest, who are laboring in the faith of the kingdom of God. But we have only begun to fulfil this aim. We have been content to have more than others, and have not asked, "What *do* ye more than others?" We have been eaten by our party strifes, and lived too much in the spirit of a sect. We are feeling, I thank God, this truth more and more; that the Church of Christ is this real communion, no party, no sect, but the Catholic body of living men; its creed, its sacraments, its ministry the power of God in actual work.

And it is this, my brethren, which, in this day of conflicting opinions, shall give us the true results of our ministry. Not, on the one side, preaching any high

claims, with a very low contrast of our performance; not, on the other, putting out of sight the reality of Church or ministry, but preaching Christ, Christ in His spirit, in His body, Christ in His word, in His sacraments; all, but Christ all and in all. That preaching, that labor, will win the heart of man. It is not true, never true, irreverent as the age may be, forgetful or scornful of authority, that men will refuse the voice of the Master, when it is heard in no arrogant claim of office, no mere pulpit orator, but in a Catholic-minded, Catholic-hearted servant of God. The spirit of all bows to the authority of love, of genuine action. Saintly lives are the great argument. We must be living ministers of the living Lord. If we teach the Christian faith, as it made believers one in a time when an Apostle's Creed and a Nicene Creed rose out of the heart of Christendom, not the Gospel according to this school or that, but the whole, undivided truth: if we minister His sacraments in their simple majesty, not undervaluing them, or forgetting the need of a personal faith with them; if we show men our ministry, not as preaching ourselves, but Christ; a ministry inspiring us with a more Catholic spirit, a more fervent worship, a more thorough action; magnifying our office by our love, our courtesy; provoking others not to hatred, but to a willing examination of its claims; if we show the kingdom of God as a real fellowship, beyond all societies on earth Christ's organized power of social healing, joining rich and poor, high and lowly, giving to all a common faith, a common prayer, making them feel that this is the very

Christ, who went about doing good, unseen yet seen in His body, then we shall be His servants who hath the unchangeable priesthood. Every such disciple is the successor of the great Diaconus, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister; every church for the poor, every school for the ignorant, every deed of love, is His argument. Our mission shall not fail, but the signs shall follow us. His word, as it comes warm from our hearts, shall make men feel that they listen to no "idle tale," but to the good tidings of great joy to all people; His work shall win reverence for our office, for Christ in us. The sick in soul and body shall find a healer; the lowly shall recognize in us the very link that binds them to the family of God, and give the best homage of their affection; the worldly and the doubting shall see in us the divine calling. Yes! when I think of the power of such a ministry in a time when, as never before, there is needed an enlarged learning, a living truth to meet the strifes of opinion; when, as never before, the vast efforts of charity ask a Christian guidance; when our young social life craves training in the laws of a Christian citizenship; when the broken body of the Lord is yearning after its long-lost unity; when I think what our power can be, who have this goodly lineage, this organic strength, this Catholic heritage, I pray God that He may shower a double portion of His spirit on us, may give this apostolic mind, and heart, and will.

Into this ministry of Christ you, my young brethren, are enrolled this day. You are made witnesses of Him, who as at this time gave the mysterious gift to His

chosen, and sealed it with His promise forever. I charge you in His name that you know the reality of your high calling; that you remember it is not of man, or by man, but of God; that in your knowledge of its source, you grasp its duties, its true service. Live always as in the presence of the Incarnate Head. Live, in this age of unbelief on one side, and tradition on the other, of modern Sadducee and Pharisee, as believers in the real kingdom of God. Preach and baptize, as men who are yourselves baptized with the Holy Ghost. Preach the Gospel of Christ in the Church of Christ. My brethren in this holiest bond of our Master, as with silent and bowed hearts you receive this gift, I commend you to Him, who will go with you through each year and labor of your consecrated life, who will bear with you the yoke and burthen, and give you His strength. It is a solemn office. It is higher, weightier than all others that rest on men. It is a glorious office, and to him who so labors for Christ and His Church, it has the richest blessing. May such be the power of your ministry, wherever your lot is cast, in a humbler or larger lot: and such the blessing which the Chief Shepherd shall give, when He shall appear, as once at the close of His earthly life. As I speak these words, I hear again His voice; but it is no longer on the mountain, where He breathed His last benediction: I hear Him now in this holy place, I hear Him, as behind the veil of this sacred rite His consecrating hand rests on the heads and hearts of His young servants, and He says, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."